Winning at the NTC:

Reconnaissance

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The first article in this series discussed an instance in which poor reconnaissance by a battalion in training at the National Training Center (NTC) was largely responsible for its own failure to accomplish its mission despite the presence of only a small OPFOR unit.* (See INFANTRY, November-December 1983, pages 31-33.)

The OPFOR units assigned to the NTC have demonstrated a considerable degree of effectiveness in carrying out their reconnaissance missions. In this article, therefore, we will look at the OPFOR reconnaissance techniques, which combine stealth with speed and which use motorized and dismounted elements in close coordination.

Because the OPFOR's dismounted infantry assets are usually quite limited, much of its deep reconnaissance as described here is done by its mounted elements. Generally speaking, then, the OPFOR uses what dismounted infantry assets it has to occupy vantage points, breach obstacles, and reconnoiter as far forward as the main U.S. positions. But when it has more dismounted infantry assets than usual, it employs dismounted patrols as shown on the accompanying sketch.

This sketch illustrates how both mounted and dismounted patrols are used to give the OPFOR commanders detailed and accurate information about the disposition and movements of their opponents — the U.S. battalions that have been sent to the NTC to maneuver against them.

First, dismounted patrols secure the zone assigned to the OPFOR unit, which is usually considered to be a motorized rifle regiment. These patrols, moving as stealthily as possible and usually at night, scout and secure key vantage points overlooking the regiment's intended avenue of advance — the points labeled A on the sketch.

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Once these points have been secured, both the dismounted and the mounted patrols reconnoiter the U.S. force's obstacles, locate routes through and around them, and secure the far side. If possible, the dismounted elements also breach the obstacles at various points — shown as B on the sketch — after which stay-behind elements are designated to hold the breaches and the routes around the obstacles while the patrols themselves move on.

The patrols next conduct a reconnaissance of the objective points labeled C. The dispositions and levels of preparation on the objective tell the patrols a lot — if few preparations have been made, for instance, it indicates to them that the U.S. force does not intend to make a stiff fight at the objective. Accordingly, the OPFOR will search for prepared positions to the rear (points labeled D).

Once the U.S. force's positions have been located and reconnoitered, the OPFOR patrols locate and secure routes around or through those positions (points labeled E). Finally, they reconnoiter and secure vantage points in the rear of the U.S. positions (points labeled F).

As a result of these efforts, the OPFOR has fairly complete security all along its intended avenue of advance as well as a detailed picture of the U.S. force's dispositions and a pretty good picture of its plan of action.

The speed phase of the reconnaissance begins at about first light. BRDM reconnaissance vehicles and motorcycles follow the routes that have been marked and secured by the dismounted patrols. Once in the rear of the U.S. forces, the mounted reconnaissance force calls down artillery fire on the U.S. units, guides OPFOR motorized and tank forces, and plunges on to deep objectives, providing continuous reconnaissance for the units of the motorized rifle regiment all the way to their final objectives.

The use of motorcycle scouts by the OPFOR during this phase is particularly noteworthy. Each motorcycle scout is assigned a U.S.

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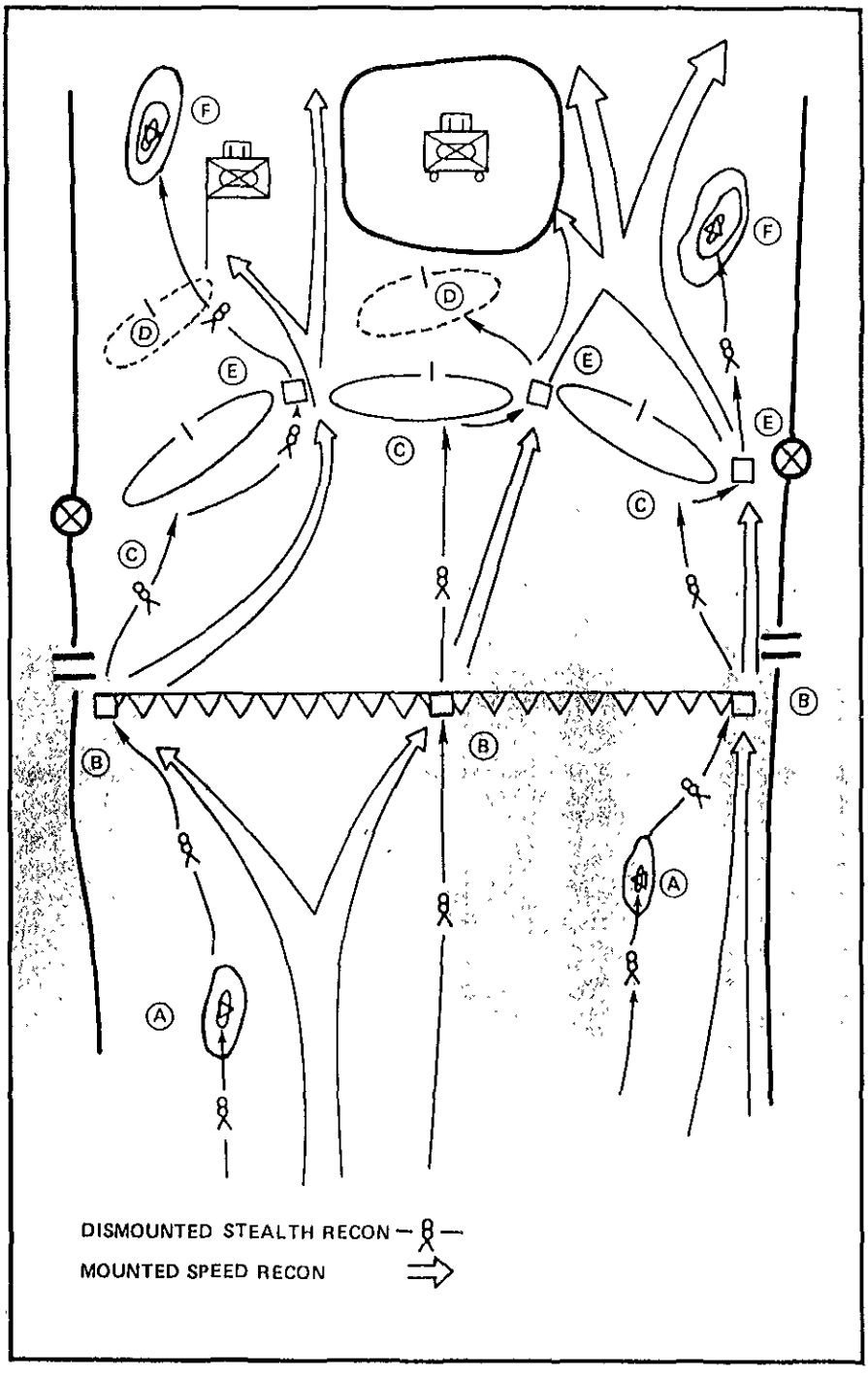

maneuver company to watch, and each scout "clings" to his assigned company. When the company moves, the scout moves with it. When the company arrives in new positions, the scout moves to its flanks and coordinates with other scouts who have been covering the flanking units, just as a U.S. company commander coordinates with the commanders of the units on his flanks.

The OPFOR reconnaissance plan, put together by the intelligence officer, is carefully coordinated with the intended scheme of maneuver. Throughout the operation, the information the patrols and scouts produce is collated carefully and then disseminated quickly, efficiently, and continuously to OPFOR commanders at all levels.

The reconnaissance techniques of many of the U.S. battalions stand in stark contrast to the OPFOR's smooth, thorough process. To begin with, U.S. units seem to view their dismounted patrols and mounted reconnaissance efforts as separate and unrelated activities. Too, their intelligence efforts focus more on learning how the OPFOR "usually" operates than on where it is and how it plans to operate *today*.

In actual practice, scout platoons rarely work for the S2s. The S2s don't train the scout platoons or get involved in training the patrols. In fact, at the NTC most commanders assign "tactical" missions to their scout platoons, using them as extra mechanized rifle platoons. The S2s, on the other hand, stay busy analyzing terrain and drawing up templates. (In justice to our S2s, most of them know the facts about Soviet tactics and equipment. But they seldom think of the OPFOR at the NTC as a flesh-and-blood opponent. Accordingly, while they often know what the OPFOR should be doing — since the OPFOR uses Soviet tactics and techniques — they seldom know how to go about finding out what the OPFOR is actually doing.)

In the U.S. battalions, too, patrolling is usually left to the rifle company commanders. A typical operations order, therefore, will simply direct the companies to send out patrols, or give them permission to do so, without telling them *where* to send the patrols. There is usually no attempt at putting together a coordinated patrolling plan. As a result, most companies don't even send out patrols because, as one company commander said, they "don't want to spend all night looking for lost patrols."

A related matter is the commander's reconnaissance. Typically, the problem of the commander's reconnaissance is not addressed in planning, or, if it is, commanders are told that they may conduct their reconnaissance within a certain time frame without any further guidance. Company commanders, therefore, often neglect to conduct a personal reconnaissance at all. On occasion, when company commanders have conducted a reconnaissance, clashes between the reconnaissance parties have been reported.

What would be wrong, then, with including something like the following in the briefing of the operations order?

Commanders' recon will leave from this location at ---- hours. Each company commander and the AT platoon leader is authorized to bring one vehicle and up to four people. The objective rallying point/release point for the commanders' recon will be coordinates ----. You will have one hour to complete your special recon and return to the ORP. Turn in a sketch of your intended recon to the S2 before we leave. Alpha Company will provide one platoon for security.

And because the U.S. units at the NTC must also find ways to deal with the OPFOR scouts, counterreconnaissance must be a part of every defensive plan.

Thus, the first thing the U.S. forces should do is to establish OPs covering the OPFOR's likely approach into their sectors. They have to do this anyway to provide early warning, but after the sun goes down the OPs should change their mission and become ambushes, lying in wait for OPFOR patrols.

They should also place additional ambushes on the likely routes through or around their positions and establish moving patrols to cover both the likely OPFOR patrol routes and any gaps in the ambush plan.

Any obstacles that are emplaced should have ambush parties either lying in front of them or actually wired-in as strong points. (In the latter case, the forces in the strong points should send out ambushes.)

Several important lessons about reconnaissance can be learned from the experiences of the battalions that have trained at the NTC:

- S2s must learn to regard their job as a search for a flesh-and-blood opponent and not as a classroom exercise. In map and command post exercises, they must constantly remind themselves that they don't know where the enemy is and consider how they will go about finding him.
- All reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance efforts must be coordinated into a single plan, and this plan should be an annex to the operations order. The U.S. units should adopt some of the highly effective techniques the OPFOR uses.
- The S2 must be actively involved in the training of the scout platoon and in the patrolling effort itself.
- Commanders' reconnaissances must be planned and coordinated.
- Land navigation training, particularly at night, is critical. A fear of losing patrols can only inhibit aggressive patrolling.
- At both company and task force levels, there must be a plan for dealing with the OPFOR's motorized reconnaissance elements in case they get through. Using ambushes and tank-killer teams from the unit trains is one way to do this. And company commanders must be alert for those OPFOR motorcycle scouts and must find them and get rid of them.

If the U.S. forces will adopt some of these techniques, their reconnaissance efforts can be as effective as those of the OPFOR in future battles at the NTC and elsewhere.

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TOW Jeep Modification

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The jeep-mounted TOW system is the heart of the 82d Airborne Division's potent airborne antiarmor defense and has been for almost 10 years. Although the lightweight, modular components and "first round kill" ability of the TOW make it perfectly suited to the highly fluid mission of airborne units, its primary carrier, the M151A2 one-quarter ton truck, has presented some problems in crew safety and performance. The solutions the Division found for these problems may prove helpful to other units as well.

Captain V.J. Bero, while commanding Company E, 505th Infantry (Airborne), identified the principal safety problems and proposed some solutions. These solutions, as shown on the accompanying sketch, were modified to streamline production and improve effectiveness and became the basis for upgrading the Division's entire TOW jeep fleet.

One of the problems with safety was the expected proliferation of wire